

# rob mclennan's blog

ROB MCLENNAN'S BLOG

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**Saturday, June 12, 2021**

## Mouse Eggs (1976-81): an interview with Ken Norris and Endre Farkas, and (incomplete) bibliography,

*[this interview was conducted over email from December 2020 to May 2021 as part of a project to document literary publishing, see my bibliography-in-progress of Ottawa literary publications, past and present here](#)*

**Ken Norris** was born in New York City in 1951. He came to Canada in the early 1970s, to escape Nixon-era America and to pursue his graduate education. He completed an M.A. at Concordia University and a Ph.D. in Canadian Literature at McGill University. He became a Canadian citizen in 1985. For thirty-three years he taught Canadian Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Maine. He currently resides in Toronto.

**Endre Farkas** was born in Hungary. His family escaped during the 1956 Hungarian uprising, and settled in Montreal. He has collaborated with dancers, musicians, actors, and the other Vehicle Poets. He has published two novels, eleven books of poetry and two plays. His work has been translated into French, Spanish, Italian, Hungarian and Slovenian. He has read and performed widely in Canada, the United States, Latin America, and Europe, and has created performance pieces that have toured across the country and abroad.

He has also translated the poetry of Bari Karoly.

His book *How To* was nominated for the A.M. Klein poetry award in 1983. He is the two-time winner of the CBC radio Poetry "Face Off" Competition.

His collaborative book and videopoem with Carolyn Marie Souaid, *Blood is Blood*, was the winner of Zebra's International Poetry Film Festival (Berlin) in 2012.

His two novels *Never, Again* and *Home Game* were published by Signature Editions in 2016 & 2019 respectively. *Home Game* was shortlisted for the Hugh MacLennan prize for Fiction. He is a proud non-card carrying member of the Vehicle Poets and *Mouse Eggs*.



**Q:** How did *Mouse Eggs* first begin?

**Ken Norris:** Great question. I don't remember. Maybe Artie [Gold]. Artie had a sign, didn't he? A sign in his study about *Mouse Eggs*?

**Endre Farkas:** Ken, being the Vehicle historian, is probably the best person to answer this. I think Artie suggested the title. I think it was our prolific time and our looking to publish what we wrote *toute suite*. The sacredness of the immediacy. And in keeping with the Vehicle spirit of "if you want it done, then do it." I don't think it was a conscious decision but it was the Vehicle Poets' house organ. Invitation was by mimeo. Serious little mags were popping up all over the country (I think) but not "playful" ones.

Maybe *TISH* was our predecessor? (at least in name). And we had the "means of production." Ken, correct me (he will) if I'm wrong.

**KN:** Artie had a sign, and he had a guy to draw the covers: Marc Nerenberg.

I was a Ph.D. student at McGill, and I had access to a ditto machine, and stencils. Endre had access to a ditto machine and stencils at John Abbott.

**The Vehicle Poets** were all talking to one another before we were the Vehicle Poets. We were all running magazines. But we wanted to do something that was instant and immediate. That was *Mouse Eggs*. Circulate the stencils this week and run it off next week. There were no editors. Everybody who was given stencils self-edited. Everybody also typed up their own

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stuff. Endre and I were the producers of the product. We ran the mimeograph machines and stapled the issues together. I think it was a run of 50 copies. Sold exclusively at The Word.

Was the Gallery the drop-off site for the stencils? I don't remember. Did we mail them in? Back when the postal service worked? Maybe.

**Q:** Endre: you mention *TISH*, but had you other models for *Mouse Eggs*? What else was going on around you in Montreal at that time? Had either of you seen copies of *TISH*, or had you only heard tell of it?

**EF:** We also put "Typos copyright of poets." No, we didn't mail them. At least I don't remember doing this though John (McAuley) & Stephen (Morrissey) might have. Yes, John was publishing *Maker* & Stephen *Montreal Journal of Poetics*.

I had heard of *TISH* (Canadian Poetry class with Michael Gnarowski, and George Bowering was in Montreal at the time, so I might have seen a copy or two. I'm sure Artie had copies. George was already connected with Artie.

**KN:** Artie had copies of *TISH*, and he would let me "examine" them in his study. I couldn't take them out of the room. So I'd seen *TISH*. And I THINK the Frank Davey edited reprint of *TISH 1-19* came out in 1975, around *Mouse Eggs* time.

*Booster and Blaster* had been a few years earlier, but I wasn't around for that. I was newly arrived in this incarnation.

*Mouse Eggs* wasn't like anything else in Montreal. We just wanted an outlet for work that was hot off the pen. I think the "holiday" themed issues came later.

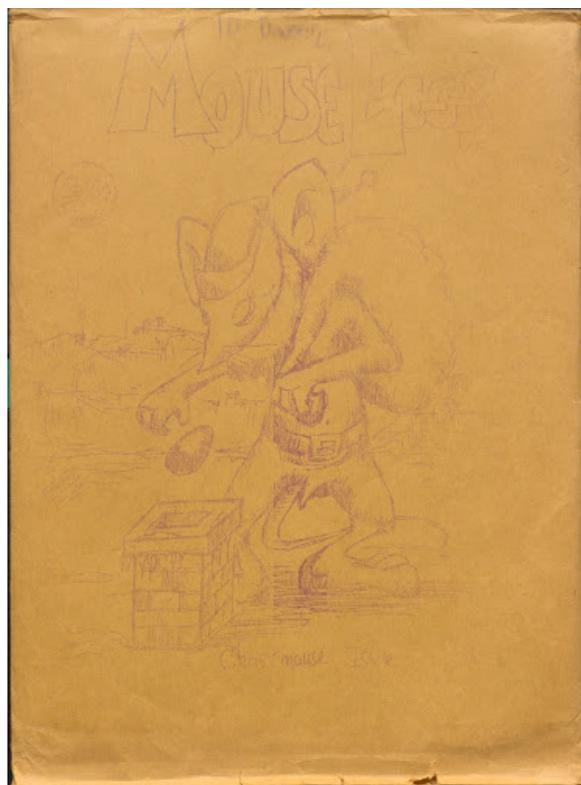
**Q:** How were the first issues put together? Were you soliciting work, or did you put out a call? How was work gathered?

**KN:** I remember handing out ditto sheets to the Vehicule Poets, maybe down at the Gallery. I think everybody got two ditto sheets, two pages. To put whatever they wanted on their pages. So it definitely started with the 7 of us, and maybe 14 pages. So the work was self-selected, and then everyone could be surprised. Including the guy who was putting the issue together, me or Endre. I believe the fourth issue was done in concert with the Spring Poetry Marathon, and maybe that was the Second Annual Spring Poetry Marathon, held at Vehicule Gallery (the first one had been at Concordia). And everyone who participated was given a page. So that was our biggest issue, and our most inclusive issue. I believe Augie Kleinzahler has a poem in that issue, along with LOTS of other people. I remember it as being forty pages, and difficult to staple!!

**Q:** The *Vehicule Poets* anthology through John McAuley's Maker Press was published in 1979, not long after the initial run of the journal. How important was *mouse eggs* in helping the seven poets in the "Vehicule Poets" shape into an informal group?

**KN:** Good question. I believe there is a collaborative poem in the first issue of *Mouse Eggs* written by our seven. That's the first "collaborative act" of the group, and it gives birth to *Mouse Eggs*. So I see *Mouse Eggs* as THE central document of the Vehicule Poets. It's lighthearted, but it's also a serious collaborative act. It's the construction of the clubhouse. It's the unofficial official organ of the Vehicule Poets.

**Q:** Moving through the bibliography for *mouse eggs*, what strikes me is both the incredible pace with which new issues appear, as well as the geographic range of writers, which suggest that word was getting out about what it was you were doing. You've contemporaries from across North America appearing in the pages of *mouse eggs*, but no elder poets, whether Bowering or Blaser or Davey or even Louis Dudek, who was around the Vehicule vicinity. Was this deliberate, or was the journal really one of ongoing happenstance?



**KN:** Let's compare *Mouse Eggs* to *CrossCountry* for a minute.

In *CrossCountry* I was interested in getting ALL of the older poets in Canada and America into the pages of the magazine. Heavy-hitters and newcomers. I mean, I got a poem from F.R. Scott who was close to eighty at the time.

*Mouse Eggs* wasn't really a magazine. Every issue was a moment in time. It's Valentine's Day—let's go!! What have we got?

Who have we got? Here's the photograph of that moment; now let's move on to the next moment.

I agree--there was an incredible pace. I like what you said about "ongoing

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## editor/publisher

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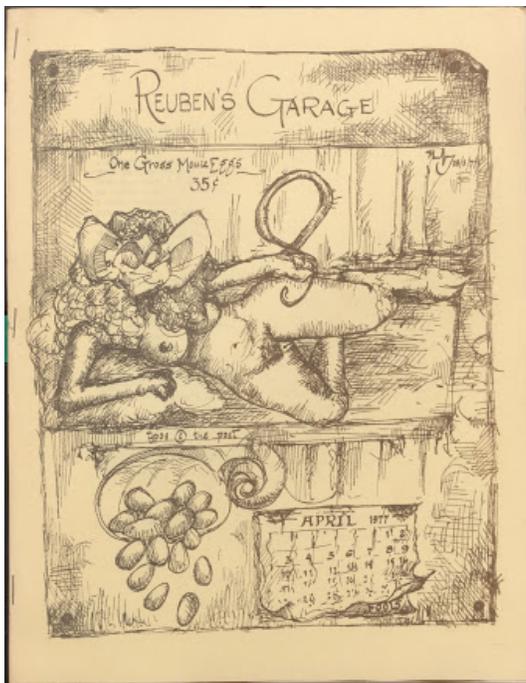
happenstance"—that is it exactly. I put poems in *Mouse Eggs* I would never try out anywhere else.

At McGill, Dudek was talking to me constantly about “permanence” in poetry. *Mouse Eggs* was as ephemeral as you could get. We were just leapfrogging from holiday to holiday, whim to whim. I tried my hand at writing a few forgeries. There’s a Tom Konyves poem that wasn’t written by Tom Konyves. There’s a John McAuley poem that wasn’t written by John McAuley.

*CrossCountry* was getting money from the National Endowment of the Arts and the Canada Council. *Mouse Eggs* wasn’t getting money from ANYBODY. Endre was mimeographing issues at John Abbott and I was mimeographing issues at McGill. These days they would probably say that we were stealing paper. But things were looser then.

Louis probably would have been offended if I asked him for poems for *Mouse Eggs*. We weren’t *The Tamarack Review*. We were maybe like *First Statement*, but without the John Sutherland editorials. There was no editor. There was no cohesive aesthetic. It was just meant to be fun. Poets having fun, as opposed to working on their careers. At that time none of us had a careerist bone in our bodies.

**Q:** Once the Vehicule Poets were formed as an informal group, what did that mean, exactly? Was this a way for the seven of you to distinguish yourselves from the other poets working in the city? Was it a marketing tool for readings? What did it mean to the group of you?



**KN:** In a way, the Vehicule Poets became aware of themselves by being denigrated by other folks in town who called them “those fucking Vehicule Poets.” And what they meant were those poets who were running the Press and the Reading Series down at the Gallery. And it was, “Oh, they must be talking about us.” And “Oh, they must be talking about the group of us.” And the “us” was the three of us who were editing books for the Press: Endre, Artie, and I. And the “us” was the folks who were running the Reading Series, which was Claudia, Endre, Artie, John, Stephen, and Tom. So when people are talking about “the fucking Vehicule Poets” that must be who they are talking about.

So that’s the way that we were aware of the fact that we were being talked about and being dismissed all together.

In late 1978, we called a meeting at Artie’s house to discuss whether we all wanted to appear in an anthology together. Everybody showed up. Everybody talked about it for a couple of hours. And we decided that we DID all want to appear in an anthology together. So we applied the label “The Vehicule Poets” to the anthology, and it was published by John’s Maker Press in 1979.

But *Mouse Eggs* started coming out in 1975, before we were ever officially “the Vehicule Poets.” We were just a bunch of friends doing a mimeographed magazine together.

Once we were a group, what it meant was that, when Artie died, and they ran his obituary in the *Globe & Mail*, they called him Artie Gold, Vehicule Poet.

You should read my poem “Montreal, 1975,” which is in *South China Sea*. I talk about what it was like for me to find the other six. I say that once we found one another we were “no longer alone / in the vast soup of being.”

So there’s THAT. And that, for me, was significant. I suddenly had friends. I suddenly had friends in poetry. I wasn’t going to have to conduct “a career” on my own. We didn’t THINK in careers then. Did we think “in marketing”? I don’t think so. We were just stating the obvious—we were 7 poets who were hanging out with one another and collaborating with one another.

And one of the things we were collaborating on was *Mouse Eggs*.

**EF:** I don’t remember ever consciously thinking about being a Vehicule Poet as a way to distinguish myself from others. Ken is right us being dubbed the Vehicule Poets was derogatory. I think Tom liked the label because it suggested motion, moving ahead. (Read “No Parking.”) We didn’t ever have a meeting about the name or writing a manifesto. Our manifesto, if you can consider it such, was our experimenting: Tom with his videopoetry, me with my collaboration with dance and music, Stephen in his work with a visual artist, John with concrete poetry, Ken in collaboration with Tom, John, Stephen and me. Claudia’s “radical” work was eroticism and feminism. I thought and still do that Stephen Morrissey poem “regard as sacred the disorder of my mind” was as close as we got to a manifesto. I consider it our unofficial anthem.

Peter Van Toorn referred to the Vehicule Poets as “the messies” and to himself, Solway & Harris as “the neats.” What he meant by “messy” was that that we didn’t focus on craft and

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"Publishing Tips: On Attention," at [The Malahat Review](#), January 2016

a review of my "a (short) history of I." by Elizabeth Kate Switaj at [Poets' Quarterly](#)

a review of my "wild horses" a short write-up on the reading I did in November 2015 with David O'Meara and Brecken Hancock through the [Ottawa Arts Council](#)

reviewers on reviewing, for [CWILA](#), November 2015

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review of *Why Poetry Sucks: An Anthology of Humorous Experimental Canadian Poetry* (Insomniac Press, 2014) now up at [Arc Poetry Magazine](#)

review of Pearl Pirie's the pet radish, [shrunken](#) (BookThug, 2015) at [The Small Press Book Review](#)

review of *Pattie McCarthy's x y z & (Ahsahta, 2015)* at [The Small Press Book Review](#), March 2015

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"On Writing" at [Catina Noble's blog](#), January 2015

"Life Is Too Short For A Long Story," a new essay up at [Numero Cinq](#), January 2015

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Profile of Stuart Ross' *Proper Tales* Press, at [Open Book: Ontario](#)

Author's Note, at [matchbook lit](#), September 2014

"Ottawa Lit: fall 2014 preview," at [Open Book: Ontario](#)

review of *The Uncertainty Principle: stories*, (2014) at [Necessary Fiction](#)

review of *The Uncertainty Principle: stories*, (2014) at [Broken Pencil magazine](#)

"rob mclennan on Elizabeth Smart," re-posted at [Literary Mothers](#)

review of Eric Baus' *The Tranquilized Tongue* (City Lights, 2014) at [The Small Press Book Review](#)

Profile of Jason Christie, at [Open Book: Ontario](#)

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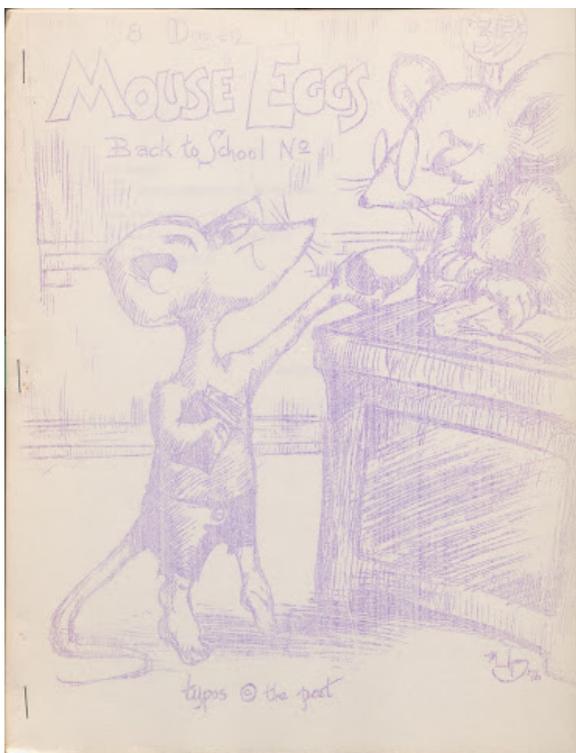
review of Lisa Jarnot's a princess magic presto spell (Solid Objects, 2014) at [The Small Press Book Review](#)

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review of Pearl Pirie's *Quebec Passages* (2014) at [The Small Press Book Review](#)



form. It was a “fun” and “derogatory” term at the same time. I think he and the other “neats” were wrong. We were probably as, if not more, concerned with craft. We just weren’t reproducing/manufacturing the old forms. We were interested in “making it new.” And we were having fun. Serious fun. And *Mouse Eggs* was one the ways we were having it. And for me that was important.

Marketing? The closest I got to doing that was going to the Atwater and Jean Talon markets to buy fresh fruits and vegetables.

**Q:** What do you feel the journal accomplished, and what was behind the decision to end it? Did it simply run out

of steam?

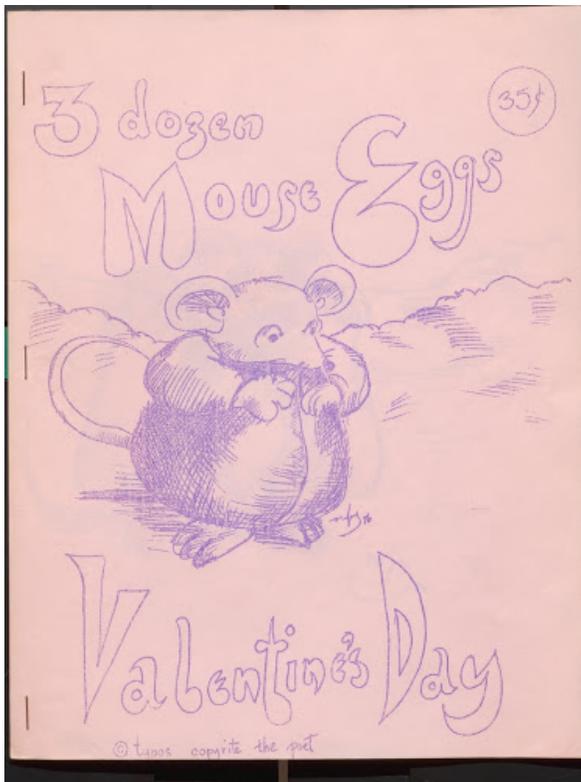
**EF:** I honestly don’t remember.

**KN:** The first “series” of *Mouse Eggs* was twelve or thirteen issues in 1975 and 1976.

We came back to it for a “second series” in 1980 and 1981. I still don’t remember how many issues were in the second series, but I am guessing that it was three or four.

We had a lot of fun doing *Mouse Eggs*. It was only produced in batches of 50 copies. We were mostly doing it for us. It wasn’t going for any kind of cultural impact. We wanted to have fun, and fun was had. It was probably less fun to do the second series, which is why there were fewer issues. The second five years of the *Vehicle Poets* was less coherent and less energetic. We were still hanging out in twos and threes, not so much in sevens. Claudia left for the States, and I was in the South Seas a lot.

**Mouse Eggs bibliography [incomplete]:**



Mouse Eggs, one dozen. Poems by Ken Norris, Tom Konyves, Artie Gold, Stephen Morrissey, Jim Mele, Claudia Lapp, Peter Kaye and andre farkas.

Mouse Eggs, two dozen. “SPECIAL HOLIDAY ISSUE--CHRISTMASS,” 1976. Poems by Raymond Filip, Ken Norris, Artie Gold, Tom Konyves, s. morrissey and Patricia Walsh.

Mouse Eggs, three dozen. “Valentine’s Day.” Produced as Stephen Morrissey and Pat Walsh wedding announcement. Poems by John McAuley, Artie Gold, andre farkas, Harland Snodgrass, Ken Norris, TEEK (T. Konyves), Arnold Snardon and stephen morrissey.

Mouse Eggs, four dozen. \_\_\_\_\_. Produced to coincide with the Second Annual Spring Poetry Marathon. Poems by Mona Elaine Adilman, G.C. Ian Burgess, Muriel Byer, ritchie carson, Catherine Cole, Frances Davis, Donna Dimaulo, Raymond Filip, Gilbert Gelinas, Artie Gold, Bob Johnson, Gertrude Katz, T. Konyves, Helen Kosacky, claudia lapp, Carole H. Leckner, John Lehdorff, Orin Manitt, C.W. Marchant, John McAuley, Elizabeth Metcalfe, stephen morrissey, Dick Mundel, Ken Norris, Leslie Nutting, Inge (Mrs.M.) Packer, Edward palumbo, Robert Rayher, Elizabeth Richards, Allen Roth, Ray Shankman, Harland Snodgrass, Ari Snyder, richard sommer, Paul Walker and Pat Walsh.

Mouse Eggs, five dozen. Easter, 1976. Poems by John McAuley, Ken Norris, janet kask, Jim Mele, andre farkas, Jesus of Nazareth, Jr., Artie Gold and Geoff Young, Murphrie Roos, Jim Joyce and T. Konyves.

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[review of Hoa Nguyen's As Long As Trees Last \(Wave Books\), at Galatea Resurrects](#)

Mouse Eggs, six dozen. "Mouse Warnings," 1976. Poems by Susan Blaylock, Guy Birchard, Helen Kosacky, Stephen Morrissey, Patricia Walsh, G.C. Ian Burgess, Marquita Crevier, T. Konyves, Claudia Lapp, Andre Farkas, Ken Norris, Robert Galvin, Artie Gold,

Mouse Eggs, eight dozen. "Back to School," 1976. Poems by Mash, Penny Chalmers, T. Konyves, Claudia Lapp, Guy Birchard, Ritchie Carson, Andre Farkas, Artie Gold, Maurice Zerkon, Sean Seamus Wilmut, Jeffrey and Colin Morton, Henry Hershfeld, Michael Largo, Ken Norris and T. Konyves.

Mouse Eggs, nine dozen. "Trick or Treat," 1976. Poems by Hopeton Anderson & Guy Birchard, Jim Mele, S. Morrissey, John McAuley, Opal L. Nations, Ken Norris, T. Konyves and Barry Cornwall. "ENDGAME by Samuel Beckett, A Review," "Oct. 24, 1976. Powerhouse Gallery, St. Dominique" by T. Konyves.

Mouse eggs, ten dozen. "Christmouse issue," Poems by Guy Birchard, Morrissey/Walsh, Stephen Morrissey, Artie Gold, Opal L. Nations, Ken Norris, T. Konyves, Tom Cornmash, Andre Farkas, Helen Kosacky, Bill Davis, James B. McGinniss, Carol E. Cohen, Mike Breiner and Tinker Greene.

Mouse Eggs, eleven dozen. "The Tattooed Mouse," February 1977. Poems by T. Konyves, Opal L. Nations, Ken Norris, John Maccawley, Stephen Morrissey, Artie Gold, August Kleinzahler and Guy Birchard.

Mouse Eggs, twelve dozen. "Reuben's Garage," April 1977. Poems by Claudia Lapp, Opal L. Nations, Stephen Morrissey, Tom Konyves, Andre Farkas, Ken Norris, Artie Gold and Ritchie Carson.

Mouse Eggs, thirteen dozen. "Baker's dozen," June 1977. Poems by Artie Gold, Stephen Morrissey, Ken Norris, Opal L. Nations, Ken Norris, T. Konyves and Andre Farkas.

Mouse Eggs, one dozen, Series B. "Breaking through to the EIGHTIES," circa February/March 1980. Cover and back cover by Artie Gold. Poems by Stephen Morrissey, Ken Norris, Tom Konyves, Andre Farkas, Claudia Lapp and John McAuley.

Mouse Eggs, Second Gathering (Raiders of the Lost Mouse issue) 1981.

Posted by [rob mclennan](#) at [8:31 AM](#)

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[review of my Glengarry \(Talonbooks\) with Andy Weaver's Gangson \(NeWest\) by Sean Braune in Canadian Literature](#)  
[a short review/mention of a \(short\) history of I.](#) (BuschekBooks) in the [Halifax Chronicle Herald,](#)  
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["collaborating with Lea Graham,"](#) on [The Capilano Review blog](#)  
[review of Elizabeth Robinson's Three Novels \(Omnidawn\) at Galatea Resurrects #17](#)  
[review of Jake Kennedy's Apollinaire's Speech to the War Medic \(BookThug\) at Galatea Resurrects #17](#)  
[rob recommends Dirty Semiotics by Jesse Patrick Ferguson \(Broken Jaw Press, 2011\) at the Advent Book Blog, December 20, 2011](#)  
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